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Thomas A. Leach

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Dial Tones

by Thomas A. Leach

"Hello, welcome to the Ajax Manufacturing Company. If you know your party's extension number press it now."

That was the message the dulcet voice gave me when I phoned the other day. Since I didn't know the extension number, I waited for further information.

"If you want to reach the Research Department, press 22 now."

"If you want to reach the Advertising Department, press 15 now."

"If you want to reach the Accounting Department, press 43 now."

"If you want to reach the Claims Department, press 99 now."

"If you want to reach the Sales Department, press 09 now."

"If you require to talk to an operator, stay on the line, and an operator will assist you."

Well, since I wasn't sure who to talk to, I opted to stay on the line. Two minutes later, I regretted my decision and pressed 09. I thought to myself, that since sales people are usually outgoing and friendly, one would be able to help me. After pressing 09, a series of clicks occurred and a humanoid voice told me,

"Just a moment, I'll try that extension for you."

Two more clicks and suddenly Conway Twitty singing "I Lost My Heart to the High School Prom Queen," entertained me, while I waited for the humanoid to connect me to the sales department.

As Conway Twitty was getting into the back of his pick-up truck with the prom queen, another two clicks assaulted my ear, and I heard the slightly nasal monotone voice say,

"You have reached the Ajax Sales Department. Unfortunately, all personnel are busy at the present time. Please wait and somebody will assist you shortly." Click, Click, and I was back to Conway extolling the virtues of Queenie and the adventures in his pick-up truck. Now by this time, I had learned all I wanted to about the prom queen and really wished to speak to a human. After all I had been on the phone for three minutes (which seemed like 15 minutes to me.) Click, Click, again and the nasal voice said, unfortunately, all personnel are still busy. Please stay on the line, and someone will assist you, as soon as possible. If you wish to try another extension, do it now.

Tired of listening to Conway, I pressed 22, which if you will recall was the Research Department. In my mind, I figured if someone were smart enough to work in research, they would be intelligent enough to help me. Click, Click, and this time Patsy Cline was serenading me with the fact that she was crazy over me. By now my face was very flushed, eyes slightly bulging, and my hands were sweating. I looked at the phone with a feeling of hate rising in my chest. I was determined to win this battle of the pushbutton war, however long it took. Click, Click, and Patsy was cut off in the middle of Cra--. The nasal voice was with me again and informed me,

"You have reached the Research Department. Unfortunately, no one

is available at the present time. At the tone, leave a message in the voice mail box, and they will return your call as soon as possible." Beep, Beep.

My frustration reached it's peak, and I had waited so long that I had lost my voice.

I gulped, gasped, took a deep breath, paused and started to leave my phone number, when I heard,

"Thank you." Bzzzzzzzzzz.

The Great Pushbutton had won the battle and I was defeated. I carefully hung up the phone. What I really wanted to do was slam it back on the hook, but better judgement told me that I might want to talk to a humanoid sometime in the future and I didn't want to break the phone.

I then put on my sweater, got my car keys and left to go to the music store. You see, while waiting, I changed my mind and really wanted to get that cassette of Conway's, to find out what actually happened to the Prom Queen, in the back of that pick-up truck.